FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

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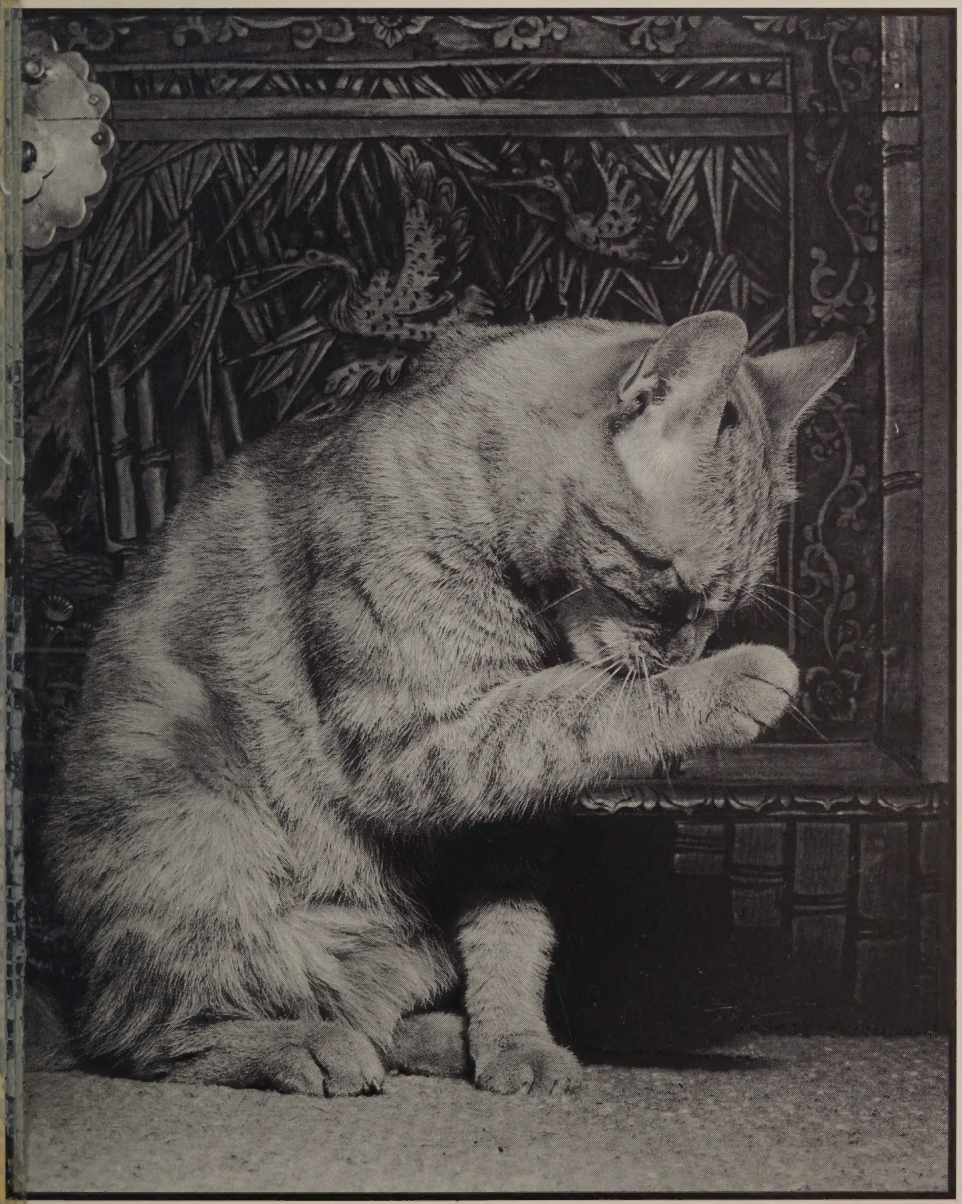

The purpose of Fellowship in Prayer is to promote the practice of prayer among all religious faiths whose fundamental belief is in God regardless of race, creed, or color, and whose tenets include the universal attributes of truth, honesty, justice, and mercy, that thereby there may arise a closer relation to Almighty God and a deeper spirit of fellowship among mankind.

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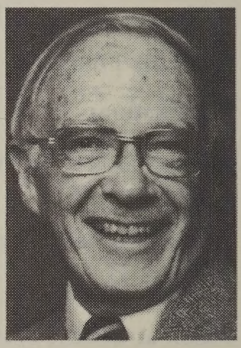


This morning I dragged myself, reluctantly, out of sleep to face a very February kind of day. At least where I live. Grey. Gloomy. Raw-cold. My waking-up thoughts trudged through my mind, heavy and depressing as the weather.

Problems at the office: squirrels racketing through the attic and walls, problems with people. Difficult relationships. I have to go to the dentist. Today, as I preview it, my world and the people in it are definitely not as I wish it or them to be. This is not a day I welcome with joy and gratitude. Better to go back to sleep.

But then, a little verse of Thich Nhat Hanh's pops into my mind:

> Waking up, I smile with joy.
> Dwelling in the present,
> This is the only moment.
> I vow to live it fully
> And to look at everybody
> With eyes of compassion.

That vow, in turn, reminds me of something that Ani Trime, a Buddhist nun and one of my favorite teachers, tells me frequently: Be grateful to everyone. Say yes to whatever comes your way. Moment by moment. Open your heart and make friends with yourself—and then with whoever appears on your path, especially anyone you dislike, or feel threatened by. Unclench your heart and let go of feelings of resentment, of pride and anger, of indifference and ill will.

The minute you let go, the miracle of transformation starts. Your basic goodness shines through and reveals that today, like every day, is a wonderful day to be alive if only you let yourself love the present moment and everything in it; its meaning, its sacred mystery.

Actually, I realize that the present moment is the only moment I can experience. All else is memory or speculation. Happiness, a peaceful mind, and the love of God, Self, a friend, or nature can only be experienced in the present moment. And only if I allow every person, every thing, and every moment to be exactly what she, he, or it is, in all their uniqueness, rather than wishing they, or I, were somehow different or "better."

That's hard to do on mornings like this (or any morning for that

matter) but it's the secret of a creative and constructive life. The "happiness" of power, money or worldly success goes almost as fast as it's gained. But living every moment to the full—in all its richness and potential—is a joy for all seasons.

The phone rings. It's the dentist's office. He's out sick today—with the flu. What joy! I feel better already. This day, like every day in the Divine Mind, is going to be perfect—moment-by-moment!

Paul Walsh

Paul Walsh

The Meditation Garden at Omega Institute, Rhinebeck, NY.

Like a star bursting into sight, Andrew Harvey, a writer with a mystical soul, has suddenly appeared on the horizon of the west shining with spiritual beauty and a magnificent gift for words. Harvey fosters a political spirituality which urges people to let go of "new age" self-absorption and work actively to transform the world.

A key to the spiritual loveliness in Harvey's writings lies in deep childhood pain, which drove him to the life of prayer. When he was six, his mother abandoned him. Years after this shattering experience, after years of daily prayer and genuine spiritual struggle, he was able to write the following:

> Her abandonment of me . . . opened a wound that no other love, until the love this book describes, and no success or worldly happiness, could heal.
>
> This abandonment was, I now see, a blessing. It baptized me in despair; those so baptized have no choice but to look for a final truth and its final healing, or die of inner famine.

Leaving a brilliant career as one of the youngest professors in the history of Oxford, Harvey went to India in search of this truth and found what he calls "the wisdom of the sacred feminine." He began to worship God as Mother rather than Father, and this devotion to the Divine Feminine brought him the love which he thought, at the age of six, he had lost forever. He writes:

> The experience of the Mother, of the Mother-aspect of the Godhead, of the Motherhood of God, is an immense, vast, constantly expanding experience of the presence of calm and blissful unconditional love as the ground of all being. Everything is in the Mother, everything is the mother, and the Mother is beyond everything, constantly drawing everything deeper and deeper into the fire of her always transforming love.

Whoever experiences this holy love, Harvey emphasizes, will soon discover that the only way to keep it is through prayer.

I highly recommend to everyone climbing the Holy Mountain *Journey to Ladakh*, *The Way of Passion*, *Dialogues with a Modern Mystic*, in fact any of Andrew Harvey's most radiant, wise, inspiring writings.

Mary Ford-Grabowsky

Robert F. Campbell

The old rabbi looked at the disciple and said: "My child, God is still where God has always been, but people have forgotten how to stoop down low enough to see him."

Hasidic Wisdom

May I no longer live save by Thee and for Thee. Be then my life, my love, my all.

Margaret Mary Alacoque

If you have lost heart on the path of love,
come to me, for I am a fortress invincible.

Rumi

When Ramana Maharshi was dying, a disciple implored him, "Please don't leave me." The teacher responded, "Where would I go?"

Source Unknown

Look where I will
I see Your face alone.
In all these idols
I see only You.

Fakhruddin `Iraqi

Giving birth and nourishing,
having without possessing,
acting with no expectations,
leading and not trying to control:
this is the supreme virtue.

Tao Te Ching

Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in God your labor is not in vain.

I Corinthians 15.58

Of what use are words of wisdom to one who is unwise?
Of what use is a lamp to one who is blind?
Hear the essence of thousands of sacred books:
to help others is virtue, to hurt others is sin.

The Dhammapada

God wants the heart.

The Talmud

Make Prayers for Tomatoes

GLEN TIG

A wise five-year-old teaches lessons in living spiritually.

First day in residence back in North Carolina, I met Jonathan, my new neighbor, who explained he would be six years old in just two more months. Immediately after meeting, we began work on my garden.

Having lived in Sitka, Alaska for the past few years, in a rainforest climate no more suited to gardening than a swimming pool, I had returned with pent-up cravings for the fruits of a southern summer.

Jonathan supervised as I tilled the beds, blending cow manure and leaves into the rich, dark redness. Saturday morning's pilgrimage to the local farmer's market filled my basket with tender young starts: banana peppers, green bells, curly parsley, sweet basil. Tomato plants by the thousands smiled and waved, some raucous, some coy, yet every one pleaded for attention. Could 20 of them compensate for my tomatoless summers in Sitka?

By noon, they were delicately transplanted, watered, fed, spaced in their beds and lovingly mulched. Prodded and nursed by the warmth of early May, they grew taller with each glance across the yard. I was proud indeed, proud as a goose with new goslings. . .

Until one afternoon about a week after planting, I pulled into my drive and from a distance, saw no sign of my 20 little champions. Stopping the car abruptly, I ran to investigate the crisis without finding even a trace of a tomato plant—no broken stems left by nibbling rabbits, no wilted remains from heat stress, no tracks from large game, nothing. Stunned, bewildered, in shock, I stumbled from row to row. The peppers too, were missing. And each and every basil plant had vanished. I was furious.

To Jonathan and his mother, I must have appeared quite the spectacle, a dazed neighbor floundering in rage. When I drove up, they were squirting each other with a water hose, squealing in happy giggles. Now, they stood close beside each other, eyeing me in silence.

"Something really weird has happened," I yelled across the yard.

Glen Tig, a North Carolina author, writes inspirational humor and non-fiction.

"My garden has disappeared." They came over to inspect for themselves. Jonathan's mother, having kept a garden her whole life, said she'd never seen anything like it. And she began questioning Jonathan as to whether he'd seen anyone messing around in my yard while he was out playing.

I called around to other neighbors and asked if they'd seen any unfamiliar vehicles or people near my lot. No one knew a thing. After an hour had passed, I heard a timid knock on my door. Jonathan stood on my porch with a frightened, sad expression offering up a handful of pitiful tomato plants. His mother, standing back in my yard said, "I'm afraid Jonathan has something to tell you."

"I found these," Jonathan said. "They were in our backyard." His mother urged him on with a stern and direct stare. "I think they might be yours," he said. With dry roots and limp leaves, my hybrid yellows and heirloom pinks were positively unrecognizable.

"Yes, I think they might be," I said. Though I tried to speak calmly, I wanted to scream when I asked, "But how do you think they got in your back yard?"

"Somebody must have put 'em there," Jonathan said. His mother's eyes pushed him farther. "I mean. . .I took 'em," he said, "because. . ."

I could feel my blood pressure rising. How dare he? I thought this little fellow liked me. I'd played with him several times. What reason could he have for being so mean to me? I looked at Jonathan with a blank face and waited while he stammered.

"Because. . .I wanted a garden like yours," he said.

I gulped. Ready for anything that would justify my fury at him, I was not prepared to be touched by such tenderness. Dumbfounded, I replied, "Oh my Jonathan." As I paused and shook my head side to side, there were no words on my tongue. But I knew whatever came out had to be careful and honest.

"Jonathan," I said, "I'm very glad that you told me what you've done, but I am so angry and confused, I have to go cool down my temper before I can talk to you about it." We all agreed to get together again in half an hour.

Besides genuinely needing to spout off some steam, I also needed time to scheme! How could I turn this into a learning opportunity for little Jonathan? When we met together in the garden half an hour later, Jonathan appeared with another handful of drooping plants. There was my cue.

"Oh, how sad those plants look," I said. "It's good that you're here now to help out so we can try to save them before it's too late." Jonathan and his mother looked about equally perplexed.

"It's very important that we hurry," I said. "Can you hear how sad these plants are? Can you hear them talking to you saying what they need?" I lifted a limp tomato plant to his ear.

"It may be too late to help them all," I said to Jonathan, "but I bet we'll be able to save a few of them."

As we collected the shovel, water hose and hand tools, I explained about plants needing many of the same things to be happy that people need. While we worked, we talked about different ways to help sick plants regain their health. I dug the holes and held the dirt back while Jonathan laid each little patient delicately in its bed. I pressed the soil firmly around the roots and he "tucked it in," surrounding it snugly with mulch. Jonathan explained how this was something else plants needed just like people.

In all likelihood, I expected that some of our replantings would survive. According to my strategy, I figured this would help Jonathan to see the worth of his work, to connect his careful efforts with prosperous, fruitful

Cliff Moore

plants. I was self-satisfied indeed as we neared the end of our task. Patting myself on the back, I thought, what a clever teacher I've been, turning this catastrophe into a lesson for my young student friend.

Busying myself with clean-up, rolling up the hose, putting away the tools, I scarcely noticed that Jonathan had made his way back to our first replanted tomato. Sitting beside it, he was musing curiously, mumbling some undiscernible words with his eyes closed. Momentarily, he completed his mysterious pow-wow and scooted without hesitation to the next plant. This wasn't part of my grand design. What possible antics could he be up to now? I sat down beside him on the ground as he resituated himself. Reaching out to the second plant, he pressed a wilted leaf gently between his thumb and forefinger. He indicated I should do the same. Then he closed his eyes.

"Little plant," he said. "I'm real sorry I pulled you up and made you get sick and have dry roots. And I'm gonna take real good care of you now and water you every day and help you get better." Humility overtook me. Jonathan continued: "and I'm real sorry and I won't do it again and I hope you grow up happy and make lots of big, red tomatoes." He opened his eyes and whispered to me, "Did I forget anything?"

Jonathan was asking me if he had forgotten anything, as if I, being the grown-up, should know. Stepping down off my pedestal, slipping back away from my pulpit in awe of the little master before me, of this lesson in sincerity, I whispered back: "Oh I think that's just about perfect, Jonathan. What do you think?"

He let go of the leaf between his fingers and said decisively: "I think there's a lot more plants to pray for on this row before we get on to the next one." He crawled ahead, took hold of another plant, closed his eyes and began another full length prayer, and another and another until each tomato, pepper and basil plant in the garden had been blessed, one by one, row by row.

Next day, Jonathan knocked again on my door to fetch me for gardening prayers. The first, second and third plants received full attention, but by the middle of the row, the blessings became noticeably shorter. Jonathan seemed to be losing steam. As we approached row number two, he stood quietly, turning his head from side to side, eyeballing all the remaining plants in front of his. Suddenly, he addressed the remainder of the garden with a volume sufficient for God in Heaven: "**LITTLE PLANTS!**. . ." he called to them all.

Some weeks later, Jonathan told me his family was moving away. I learned they were moving closer to his father's job into an apartment with a sun deck. On the day of departure, when Jonathan came over for his last inspection of our prosperous tomato crop, he inquired why there was a hole in the ground where one of the healthiest plants had been. I diverted that question, but soon he had another—about the big plastic bag on my porch, and the wide, red ribbon around it.

When I asked how many more weeks it was till his birthday, Jonathan proudly put up three fingers. His attention drifted again toward the ribbon as a grin of comprehension overtook his face. With only a slight nod of consent from me, Jonathan tore into the bag, unveiling a two-gallon pot of soil and a thriving, bushy, patio tomato plant—with blossoms.

Storytelling as Prayer

ANDY FRAENKEL

Telling a sacred story—or listening to one—can warm the soul, kindle light, and lift the heart toward God.

In Judaism, the wise men say that the easiest way for us to go to God is through a story. When the Jewish people looked upon the often hostile world around them, they found comfort and understanding in a story. The Hasidic rabbis carried on the tradition of the story with a fervor. Whether dealing with a problem, or a question, or a doubt, there was always a story to be told. My father grew up in eastern Poland and that oral tradition of the Hasidim came to me through him. The two following stories are prayers of thankfulness.

Rengetsu

Rengetsu was a woman following Zen when practically all monks were men. A woman practicing Zen! People thought it odd and would not treat her kindly. In one village she came to, they wouldn't even allow her to stay there. It was late. She had no place to go and the countryside was full of dangerous animals prowling the night. She climbed a tree and tried to sleep. It was cold and uncomfortable. How could one sleep while sitting on a tree branch? Half asleep, Rengetsu awoke with a start. The blossoms of the trees sent their sweet fragrance heavenward. Intoxicated by the fragrance, the clouds danced around the moon. The moon smiled lovingly down upon the tree. Rengetsu was struck with wonder by this site. She offered her respect to the villagers who had denied her lodging and were now fast asleep. If it had not been for them, she thought, she would have missed this beautiful exchange of nature.

The wise tell us to accept everything, both the so-called good and bad, with humility and gratitude, understanding that all that happens in our lives truly comes from a loving source.

Andy Fraenkel is the creator of "Sacred Voices," a multicultural program of storytelling and song, which he performs for schools, churches and business organizations. To receive his newsletter, you may write to him at RD 1—NBU #19, Moundsville, WV 26041.

Cliff Moore

Rabbi Akiba

"Whatever God does is done perfectly." Rabbi Akiba was fond of saying. Once he went on a journey taking with him an ass to ride upon, a rooster to wake him for his morning prayers, and a lamp for his evening studies. He came to a village and sought lodging for the night, but without success. "Whatever God does is done perfectly," the good rabbi said to himself as he found a spot in the woods nearby. As he studied, a gust of wind blew out his lamp. Then wild animals approached and frightened off the rooster and the ass.

Rabbi Akiba was left alone, but still, he good-naturedly said, "Whatever God does is done perfectly," and fell asleep beneath a tree. The next morning Akiba returned to the village only to find that it had been ransacked by a bank of dangerous thieves that very night. God had not allowed him to find lodging there. He had been spared. And if the robbers had seen his solitary light in the forest, or if his ass had brayed or if his rooster had crowed, he too would have been discovered and harassed. Therefore, he said again, "Whatever God does is done perfectly."

Indeed, when he was younger he had been harassed. He had inherited property with a good spring. His neighbors, who wanted his spring for their animals, harassed him to no end and drove him from his land. He went to a distant land where he met a beautiful woman of the Judaic tradition. He fell in love with her and her tradition. After that, whenever he prayed, he thanked God for his greedy neighbors. "Whatever God does is done perfectly."

Whatever God does is done perfectly.

In his old age, Rabbi Akiba was whipped to death by Roman persecutors. All the while, he recited the Shema, a Hebrew prayer. His persecutors asked how he could tolerate such pain. The holy Akiba answered, "In life I have served God with whatever I had. Now at the threshold of death, I thank God that I can serve with my very life."

An Interfaith Prayer

ISHWAR ALLAH ABBA-MA
ABAL-ADOM-TIMA

You are lovely.
Shy and gentle
As two spotted deer
That wean the lonely forest
From the night.
I have been yours
Since I was born.
Every beat of my heart
Every breath of my mouth
Take as an act of love
And bind us all with you.

ISHWAR ALLAH ABBA-MA
ABAL-ADOM-TIMA
John Shevlin, S.V.D.

* * * * * *

ISHWAR ALLAH ABBA-MA is a new Indian Interfaith name for God created by Fr. John Shevlin from the following words:

Ishwar - Hindu
Allah - Muslim
Abba-Ma - A New Christian Name for God that includes the feminine
Abba - used by Jesus, designating God the Father.
Ma - God the Mother. "As truly as God is our Father, so truly is God our Mother." (Julian of Norwich)

ABAL-ADOM-TIMA is a new interfaith name for God that harmonizes the six major world religions:

AB - *Abba* - Christian
AL - *Allah* - Muslim
AD - *Adonai* - Jewish
OM - *Om* - Hindu
TI - *Tien* - Confucian
MA - *Dharma* - Buddhist

Those Who Suffer

We entreat You, Lord,
on behalf of all who know frustration,
—society's failures, confined to
prisons or asylums.
Allow us to understand them
and realize that their status does
not mean they are less than we are.
For they, too, possess
the unique ability
to be men and women capable of love.

May their passion not be in vain.
May they find a place
in life, and in Your eternity.
Preserve their liberty, and the chance
for inner joy, Your gift to all.

We entreat You also
on behalf of the poor.
The ones whom You called happy.
Give true happiness to those who, like You,
have no home, no bread, who
must leave their land.

May it shame us to be satisfied diners
when so many subsist on crumbs.
May we work to change this unjust world,
which fails to reflect Your goodness.

We beseech You on behalf of those
who have lost their way, who
seek out happiness in pleasure,
and in absurdity. Summon them with a voice of revelation.
Free them from their blind hopelessness.

And for us, Lord, make us grateful
for what You have so generously given,
that we may convert
it into love.

Luis Espiñel; Translated by Thomas Feeny

An Islamic Prayer for Closeness to God

O Lord God, truly we worship Thee of our ready will. It is against our will that we trangress. We fear Thee in that Thou art great: we hope in Thee because Thou art God. We fear Thee because we are Thy servants. Our love is Thine: our fears are ours. Have mercy upon us for the sake of the grace of Thy Kingliness and the frailty of us Thy subjects.

O my God, how wilt Thou requite our transgressions, poor as we are and cast upon Thee? At Thy door we have waited, kneeling. Incline toward us with all who are loved of Thee.

It suffices us for strength that we should be Your servants. It suffices us for honour that Thou shouldest be our Lord.

O my God, in that Thou lovest Thou art ours: in that Thou art loved make us Thine.

O my God, all joy outside Thee flees away: all pre-occupation save with Thee is vain. To be happy in Thee is to be happy indeed: to be happy apart from Thee is delusion.

O my God, my whole plea is my need: my whole case is my lack of one.

from Tahārat al-Qulūb

A member of the Divine Word Missionaries, formerly a missionary in India, Fr. Shevlin is affectionately known to his friends as "the wandering preacher." Currently he resides in CA.

Luis Espiñel was a poet and activist in Central America.

Tom Feeny, a professor at NC State University, is renowned for his translations of prayers from Spanish into English.

Vision at Chaco

ALISON K. SCHULER

Two close friends pray in an ancient Anasazi kiva, a place so holy it feels like a golden bowl.

We clambered down the steep, eroded steps, my dear friend and I. We were, as enmeshed sisters, on our way to an experience which we might not have had, had we been apart, but which, together, lifted us out of ourselves. Chaco is a place long abandoned, once full of life, full of trade, now in a corner of New Mexico to which few people ever get. A lost corner of history, its cities are quietly melting into the earth from which they were taken.

The Anasazi, ancient ones, lived there, creating it after themselves, with its delicate and intricate walls, its sensitivity to astronomy, its broad sweep of canyon valley in which town after town was formed.

And its silence.

Now, it is more silence than life.

Or, so I should have said until I learned better.

Two of us, together; people who had experienced life, challenge, education, death, hope, God. I, having been ill with cancer, she, having lost a sister to cancer and caring for a father with Alzheimer's disease. We, who through our years of friendship, had sought God, loved Christ, struggled to care.

Casa Rinconada. A short distance from the road, it was, in fact, a distance into ourselves. There, we were told, was a great *kiva* into which we could venture, a place to discover the center of the developed Anasazi culture of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, a place to look and explore.

The *kiva*, the place of religious meeting, is still in use in New Mexico today. But as far as I know, great *kivas*, meeting places for many, are not.

Down into the great *kiva* we went. Its roof had centuries ago disappeared, and the sapphire sky of New Mexico on a clear day formed its ceiling. Snow lay here and there on the ground above; but, in the *kiva*, the sun enfolded us.

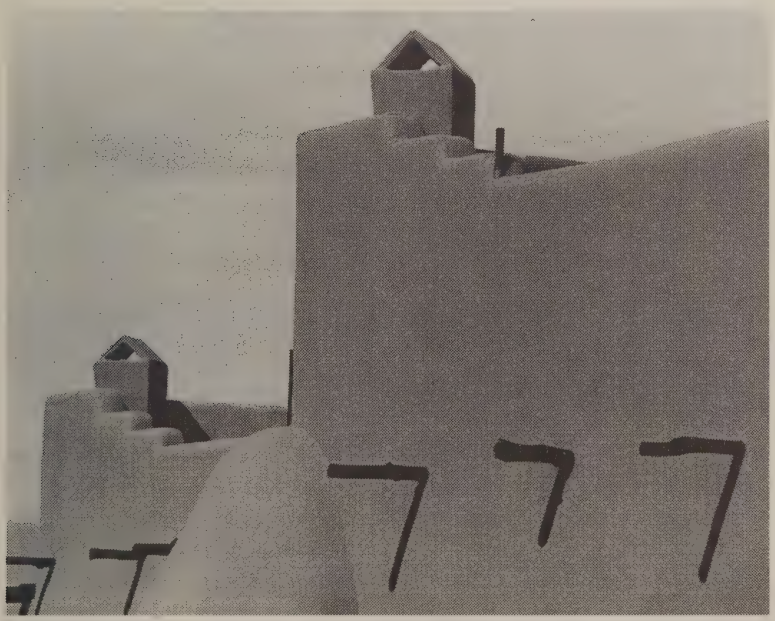
Alison K. Schuler is an attorney in Albuquerque, NM, where she is the former lay leader and current vice president of St. Luke's Lutheran Church. *Her article is reprinted with permission from* Living Prayer, *260 Beckley Hill, RR 2, Box 4784, Barre, VT, 05641.*

An archeological find, so we thought, interesting rock patterns in the walls, past customs laid in stone for us to analyze and decipher. It was not so. The moment we stepped down onto the earth floor of the great *kiva*, we knew we were on holy ground. The feeling was so intense that one could hardly stand. Surely, this was a place of the burning bush. This was a place of God.

We sat silently on the wide ledge circling the *kiva* wall, unable and unwilling to talk. There was so much of the holy in this place. The ground, the walls, radiated wholeness, peace. Our spirits quieted, and we two, seeking to be God's, striving to hear the call, became full with the health of the place. It was as if this was a rent in the veil between heaven and earth, with all of heaven gently floating in. Harmony and peace suffused the atmosphere, and we caught our mortal breaths in the moment of the eternal.

This place is God's.

Someone else thought so, too. There, on a rectangular fire pit in



Janet Gnall

Adobe Shadows in New Mexico.

the middle of the great *kiva*, was an offering from a Navajo. Every culture, and every person who seeks God, recognizes holy ground. Here was a brother or sister, leaving a bundle of nature's goodness (sage and juniper, wrapped in orange wool thread), laid just so, carefully, reverently, in this holy place.

I cannot tell you what a place this holy is like. You must experience it. I do know, I think, what made it. This is a place fashioned by prayer and a people whose worship was so full and so complete that, almost eight hundred years later, we should feel overwhelmed by the holiness their love of God brought to it. This was alive prayer, seeping through the walls, flooding the floor, permeating the atmosphere. This prayer was not so much intercession as opportunity. The quiet was the road between heaven and earth. No one entering the place could leave without blessing.

I am sure some churches and other places we inhabit today must have this quality of eternal wholeness, but I have never felt it so strongly. This place of the ancients reflects a culture so full of God that its love spans the centuries.

We had nothing to offer. The Navajo had brought the right thing, the bundle of nature's spare fecundity. We had only styrofoam cups and our sense of incompleteness. But we, too, prayed there, joining with those people of long ago.

Afterward, in the glow of reflection, I realized more fully what that *kiva* is. It is one of the golden bowls of Revelation, in which the prayers of the saints are kept. I had never before understood that no prayer is ever lost; that every prayer is carefully saved and offered to God through all eternity. The *kiva* is round because it is that bowl. The

This was alive prayer, seeping through the walls, flooding the floor, permeating the atmosphere.

sunlight made it golden, and the peace that filled the place showed its consecration as a vessel of God. Nothing is lost from there—not the yearnings, not the fears, not the hopes, not the joys, not the visions. For the harmony and glow of the great *kiva* is its vision—and mine. In the latter day, the angels and elders will stand and offer its contents to the One who created it, together with the people who sought that One and left their love's mark there.

The archaeologists have not found the graves of these great *kiva* builders, the Anasazi of thirteenth century New Mexico. The people seemed to have disappeared. After those moments in Chaco, I think I know why. They were like Enoch; they walked with God, and were no more. We shall never find their bodies, because their spirits were so vibrant that their life continues through their place of prayer to bless those of a different time and culture, and to honor the Lord.

Amen and Amen, Lord. Praise to You, Eternal God, and to the Lamb. In that place, the Spirit and the Bride say, "Come!"

The Dragons of Compassion

JANE HUGGINS

When a scientist with a poetic soul visits her ill and aging father, compassion overcomes sadness and discouragement.

"Here," my aunt said. "I went over to your father's house and saw those children running around with this in their arms." She handed me one of my mother's favorite objects, a large china bowl decorated with beautiful blue and green dragons. My mother had died about eight years previously. "I thought I would rescue it and you could take it home with you," my aunt said. As I took it, I sighed, remembering the times I had seen this particular bowl on my mother's table and wondered how I would get it home on the plane. I decided not to let that daunt me as it had been quite a while since anyone had given me something to "take home on the plane." I cradled the bowl gently in my arms and wondered what other relics of my past would wander into my arms over the weekend.

My visit this trip was in response to repeated phone calls from my aunts and neighbors of my father. They thought that he was no longer capable of "handling his affairs" and suggested that I, as his daughter, should take them over, at least to a certain extent. I sagged at the thought. I was having enough trouble keeping my own affairs in order trying to run a small business. Nevertheless I went South determined to make heads or tails of the situation and to help, if I could.

I rented a room in a nearby hotel persuading myself that distance from the situation would provide me with a more objective, and therefore, helpful perspective. The next day I visited my father's loan company, his home health care agency and a prospective home for him should he be unable to manage "on his own." This wasn't easy for me to do. Nor was it simple to acknowledge the fact that he was losing his ability to function as independently as he had in the past. He was in danger of losing his home and was not in good health as a result of a diabetic condition and recent open heart surgery. I wanted to support his need to feel "in control" and retain his home, yet at the same

Jane Huggins writes poetry and prose on issues such as death and dying, the environment, and the family. Trained as a scientist, she finds creative writing to be a "transformative" experience.

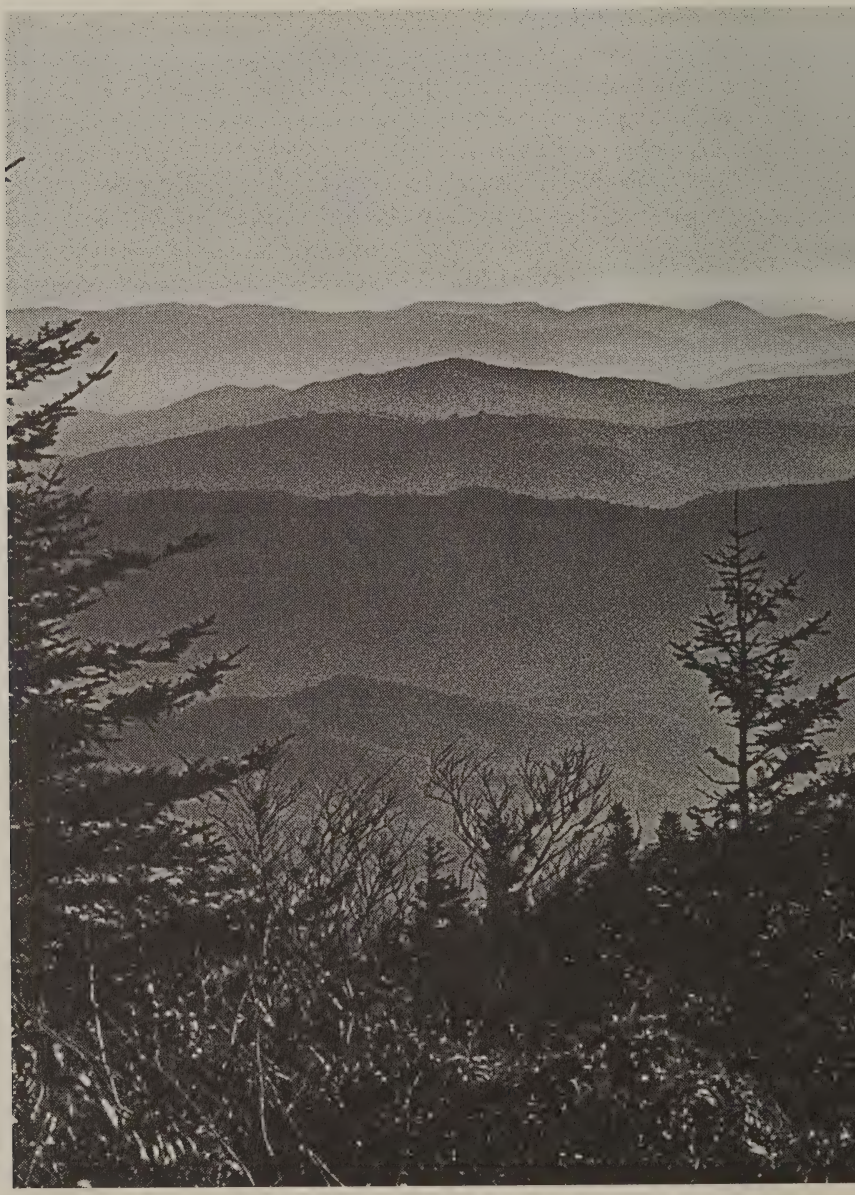
time realized that adequate support for that might not be readily available. I felt challenged by the situation to say the least and found myself wondering what the most compassionate response would be to these circumstances. I went back to my hotel room that day after taking my father out to dinner. We had talked little, eaten less, and seemed a bit removed from one another. As I settled down for the evening I found my thoughts wandering back to twilights spent running after fireflies under a hickory tree next to an old house set back from the road. An oncoming car would occasionally rush by to stir the lazy evening air as the "older folk" sat on the porch swing talking. My cousins and I had enjoyed those evenings, just as I was enjoying this nostalgia, finding comfort in the memories. Most of the "older folk" were still older, I mused, and unfortunately the porch swing was no longer.

The following two days were spent visiting with cousins and aunts and uncles, spending time by my father's side, reminiscing about times past and recognizing, as I watched my second cousins chasing "lightning bugs," that I was now the "older folk."

As our visit started winding down, I began to feel as though the dragons on my mother's bowl symbolized my need to confront my fear of growing older. Their breath, though fiery, could and probably would cleanse my heart of its clinging to the past. I thought of them as dragons of compassion because this cleansing process is transformative, opening one to a more compassionate understanding of old age.

I danced a little dance as I began to realize that true to their pictures these dragons are often fearful, representing those parts of us we don't want to acknowledge. As I watched my aging father, I knew it is was I aging. I knew that as I slowly accepted his deteriorating body and house, I would be validating and beginning to appreciate the cyclic nature of my own life. Although not entirely at peace with this deepening awareness I felt relieved and a bit refreshed. I decided that I would honor my father's wish to remain with his home until he was ready to leave it, knowing that he, and probably only he, would know when that would be.

We sat and talked the morning before my plane left. I filled in the gaps about his current financial situation and I tucked the dragon bowl under my arm as I walked out the door. I was sad at our leave-taking but knew that just as their breath had transformed me, the dragons' wisdom would continue to guide me in the upcoming days.



John M. Morgan

A Hint of a Greater Love

CHARLES GOURGEY

A widower consoles dying patients in hospices by playing his flute, holding their hands, listening and caring.

"I am with you always, even to the end of the world." (Matthew 28.20) I know of no more reassuring passage in scripture. We all need to know we are not alone. Being left completely alone, abandoned, is perhaps a child's greatest fear, and one that most of us never outgrow completely.

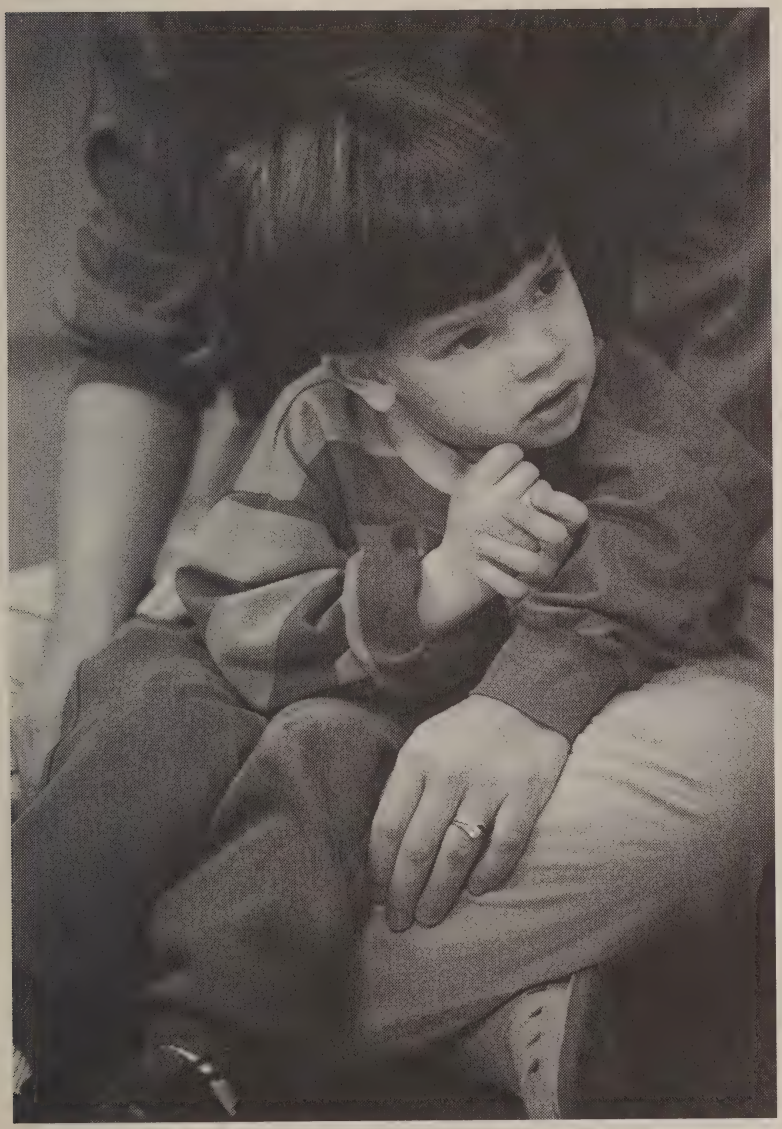
Sometimes this fear is reawakened by the thought of death. It may be the fear of our own death, or the death of someone we love. After the sudden, violent death of my wife my childhood fears of abandonment visited me once again. The presence of family and friends comforting me was a great resource, but still I needed something more. I would go into open, empty churches and meditate for long periods of time. There is something about the energy inside a church or a synagogue that is healing, that hints of a higher Presence. I needed this kind of comfort too.

One night, about six months after she died, I sensed her presence. I did not literally see or hear anything, but I had an unmistakable sense that she was in the room with me, speaking to me. She told me, at my lowest point, that I need not fear, that my life would be fulfilled. This comforted me greatly, and I carried the moment with me for some time. I would speak to her often in prayer, but in the decade since her death I never had such a sense of her presence again.

I have often wondered since about finding a spiritual presence that overcomes even the fear of death. Perhaps it was this desire that led me to work in a hospice. For the past three years I have volunteered at Jacob Perlow Hospice and Cabrini Hospice in New York City. The two hospices are only a few blocks apart, and when I finish my work in one, I take a short walk to the other.

Since I am a musician, in hospice I work primarily with music. I work with patients very close to the point of death, who may be in comas,

Charles Gourgey has published articles on spiritual themes in such journals as Spiritual Life, Pulpit Digest, *and* Bereavement.



Cliff Moore

and who cannot communicate verbally. My instrument is the recorder, a type of wooden flute. In hospice I do not play the shrill soprano recorder, favored by schoolchildren, but the alto and tenor, which have softer, mellower sounds.

Patients who cannot speak will often respond to music. There is a facial expression I often see when I first enter the room of a coma patient. The eyes are widely dilated, and the face looks frozen in an expression of terror. The patient, seemingly unconscious, expresses a fear of being isolated and abandoned. Many times as I have played at the bedside of such patients or just held their hands, I have seen their faces relax and their eyes close slowly to an expression of peace. All I have done is let them feel my presence, letting them know they are not alone.

One day I met a patient whom I will call Fern. She was reading a book, and put it aside to greet me as I entered her room. I played for her a little while, and she enjoyed it. She made me promise to see her on my next visit.

A week later I went to see her again. Her condition had deteriorated drastically. She was comatose now and moaning, almost screaming in fear. She flailed her arms in movements that seemed uncontrollable. The nurses told me she had been that way all morning. Nothing could calm her down.

I took out my recorder and played for her a long, slow, and plaintive Scottish folk tune, over and over. I would play for a few minutes, then sit and hold her hand or stroke her face, then play again. After a while she became completely quiet. I stayed with her a few more minutes, making sure she was rested and would continue to rest.

Another volunteer came into the room to tell me a patient wanted me to see her. I left Fern to visit the other patient. After my visit I heard one of the nurses say that Fern had just died. I knew that my music had helped Fern to let go, and I needed to complete my contact with her.

I went back into Fern's room, where she still lay, and I sat by her bed, took her hand, and held it for several minutes. I felt a calm quietness in the room. Finally I left to go to the second hospice.

I walked the few blocks to the hospital where the second hospice was, and entered the lobby. I made my way toward the elevator, and took it to the hospice floor. Just as I was about to step off the elevator, I stopped. I was not ready to resume my work. Something was

pulling me: a strong urge to find a quiet place, just to sit and listen. I took the elevator back to the lobby. I went to the meditation chapel, but a service was in progress; it was too noisy. I quickly left and returned to the lobby. An empty chair was waiting in one of the corners, not far from the admitting office.

A deep peace covered me like a blanket, deeper than any peace I have ever known. The room began to look different. I saw as if through a cloud. I heard children next to me, running and talking loudly, and I saw them not as children but as fragmentary expressions of pure love. A wonderfully sweet feeling came: I was not alone; a presence much greater than my own was right there with me. I stayed for a long time.

This feeling of deep peace remained with me for three days. During those three days, I took a vacation from time. In everything I did, I felt a loving presence beside me. It was with me, watching over me, assuring me. I could almost hear a voice telling me not to fear, that everything will be alright, that in the end not one of us will be forgotten. I cannot remember experiencing greater joy and reassurance.

I used to think that going through a long, protracted terminal illness was the worst fate a human being could suffer. I now know that if such people are surrounded by others who care about them, it can be a time of great resolution and healing.

I do not know quite what to make of this. I sense, somehow, that Fern and I were helping each other. I helped her prepare to leave her present form of existence, to enter a different world where she would have a new and better home. And I think she was helping me come to terms with my own existence in this world.

I wish I could say this experience transformed me forever. When those three days were over, I missed them greatly. But I know there are moments when one feels an accompanying presence dispelling one's sense of aloneness, and this knowledge endures.We are not always given such moments, but we can pray for them when we need them most.

I used to think that going through a long, protracted terminal illness was the worst fate a human being could suffer. I now know that if such people are surrounded by others who care about them, it can

be a time of great resolution and healing. Some of the hospice nurses see death as a different kind of birth, and compare their role to that of a midwife. In being present at the preparation for its rebirth, whether of a stranger or someone close to us, even through our grief we are also affected. We may be just slightly pulled toward the world that the dying person is beginning to enter, just slightly absorbed into an aura of peace. In such moments we can sense the smile of heaven, a hint of a greater love.

Feeding the Heart and Soul

NOEL HORN

"Cloaked in too many layers of clothing and pain," homeless men get in line for their only full meal of the day.

The sun rose over the city's downtown buildings, blinding onlookers with its reflection in glass windows. The residents of the city's streets seemed not to notice as they slowly formed a crooked line outside the downtown soup-kitchen. This summer's morning was the start of just another day, a day to struggle through, a day to survive. Just another day.

On this Sunday, the men were first to arrive, their ranks weaving an uneven border along the street's edge as they loitered expectantly, waiting for the kitchen's doors to open, waiting for their only full meal of the day. Some laughed and seemed to enjoy the comraderie of community they found in one another. Some stood solemnly, shoulders and spirits sagging under the weight of brokenness, cloaked in too many layers of clothing and pain. Others carried on conversations with voices only they could hear. Everywhere, the shards of broken dreams and dying hopes fell from desolate lives and glared in that morning's sun.

The line lengthened, breaking its seamlessness by angling around the corner. A few women joined the growing crowd, bringing an air of patience and resignation to the gathering. It wasn't enough to overcome the mood of restlessness that permeated the street; hunger provoked insistent demands in bodies craving food and hearts long-starved.

Inside, the volunteer workers hurried to finish their preparations, making one last check of the premises. The food was ready, the tables held vases of flowers and a thin air of civility barely disguised the large, ugly room. The crew leader reviewed the kitchen's rules and then asked us to pray.

Lord, help us remember who
it is we serve, whose work
we do, whose love we share.
Keep us mindful that what-
ever we do to the least of
Your brethren we do unto You.

A writer in Grand Rapids, MI, Noel Horn has worked in the city's inner core at a shelter for women and a soup kitchen.

Deep, deep breaths were heard as we took our places; each meal served was a singular experience for which one could never truly be ready.

The doors opened and the guests shuffled into the hall, approaching the serving table with undisguised anticipation. My day's assignment was to supervise the Church Youth Group serving the food, a task that placed me at the head of the table. The young people were barely able to conceal their nervousness, and their discomfort required reassurances and moral support. My mind wandered towards a calming place where, to my astonishment, a beloved poem, "Smiled At," by Dorothy Donnelly, distracted me from the emotionally-charged setting:

> The smile's one-syllable sign says you're seen,
> so you know you're there; its firefly-light
> can bring you out of fog or down from the clouds
> into focus; it's a dent in the dark, a mnemonic
> nudge in the crush of the day, pragmatic
> and, like the sight of a rainbow, tonic.

A larger role was being asked of me.

Wordlessly, an invitation was extended to look at each person as they approached that banquet table, to really "see" them in that moment, and to give each one recognition with a genuineness reflected in my smile. Most of the guests were startled by the unexpected greeting and many were disconcerted. All but a few murmured "thank you" in response. Without exception, each pair of eyes held mine piercing if only for one brief moment. Each fleeting encounter uncovered the person beneath the shabbiness and grime, the person behind a grizzled face or surly veneer. Souls could be seen through the windows of eyes, eyes in which pools of anonymity reflected the joy of being recognized. Each meeting was sacramental, each one a consecration of dignity and worth. Each tray lifted and placed in outstretched hands was an act of communion, a blessing for host and guest alike. Limitless intimacy linked us; barriers fell away. A Nameless Reality reached beyond the borders of that room.

On one particular day spent in the company of my city's dispossessed, I was lifted above the constraints of religions, saw institutional dross burned away and was given a vision of who we are called to be. Each of us, man and woman alike, is priest, is prophet and is servant. I glimpsed the Trinity in these three roles we are asked to bring to every encounter with another. Grace was in that sacred lesson and the lesson was humbling. My sense of "church" was forever changed.

Today, on this summer morning, the sun has risen once again over downtown buildings, and its reflection is found in glass windows. In a building not far away, perhaps a one-syllable sign will reflect God's goodness with blinding blessedness in a dreary space. Church will unfold in a soup-kitchen's dingy room. The Body of Christ will be found and be fed over and over again, on both sides of the table. Communion will embrace all of creation.

Path to the Still Center

LAURENCE FREEMAN

Laurence Freeman is a disciple of the late John Main, the celebrated Benedictine monk who played a major role in contemporary Christianity's recovery of contemplative prayer. Like his spiritual mentor, Fr. Freeman believes that the "playful work of meditation" can "liberate the monastic archetype in every person," and bring us to peace and joy.

How do I pray? If you were to ask a musician how he played he would probably reply: "by practicing." Anything that occupies us as a whole person requires regular practice. We are always beginners at anything that is real. I feel I pray by learning to pray.

The musician, if pressed for more, would then perhaps mention his teacher, as this would describe succinctly his school or tradition of playing. Although prayer, like music, is essentially universal and can transcend all barriers within and between people, it too falls into schools of spirituality. My own teacher was John Main, who first learned to meditate from an Indian monk, and then, after himself becoming a Benedictine monk, rediscovered in the "pure prayer" of the Christian desert fathers the same tradition of the mantra which his teacher had taught him.

The mantra is a sacred word or phrase which is repeated continuously with love and fidelity throughout the half-hour of the meditation period. All thoughts and other mental activities are left behind in this work. All meditation aims to bring the person, mind and body, to silence, stillness and simplicity of spirit by the means of an inner "object of attention." The act of attention is the inner sacrifice, and the work of paying attention is the school of letting go. The utter simplicity of such a way to joy and peace makes one laugh. God seduces us by simplicity. Perhaps one person's simplicity is another's complexity and another's impossibility.

A Benedictine monk and a founder of the International Community for Christian Meditation, Laurence Freeman is the author of Light Within *and* The Selfless Self. *His article has been excerpted with permission from a longer article in* The Tablet, *1 King Street, Cloisters, Clifton Walk, England.*

They say that the teacher appears when the student is ready. I was introduced to meditation at a crucial moment of faith in my early twenties, when I had outgrown the forms and beliefs of my childhood and was trying hard to relate my personal experience to "God." This opportune timing remains a most concrete example for me of how prayer, grace and faith are interrelated and are all pure gift.

The guru or spiritual teacher is, I think, a vital element in learning to pray, and so it was with me, but he or she fulfills that role by pointing beyond himself, as Jesus did by pointing to the Father. The guru, like the saint or sage, teaches by presence and example rather than by dogma and ritual; and so he reveals prayer as the inner journey of self-knowledge and self-transcendence.

For the Christian the guru is Jesus, who was asked by his disciples to teach them to pray. All Christian prayer, then, whatever its school of spirituality, is united in obedience to this master's teaching. It is meant to bring us to to be rooted in Jesus' teaching on prayer in the Sermon on the Mount, not only because of Jewish practices of repetitive prayer, but because it makes real to me what Jesus taught about interiority, trust, brevity, mindfulness and letting go of anxiety in prayer.

My aim in praying at . . . set times is to learn to pray at all times.

In meditation I find a way of moving beyond external religiosity into the solitude of the inner room; of leaving behind the babble of many words (however beautiful), in the confidence that all human needs are known to God even before they are known to us. In seeking to find the center of our being, we must combine qualities of play and work, freedom and discipline: in the playful work of meditation I find a way to leave anxiety behind so as to set the mind upon the Kingdom before everything else. This does not mean that meditation is a quick fix for all problems, but it does wonderfully change the ground on which we face them: from the ground of the ego to the ground of being. . . .

As a child I can remember, like most people, powerful experiences of God in which no conceptual software of understanding was yet loaded into my brain. Later the software tended to supersede this experience. As the ego develops in a person, prayer tends to become

John M. Morgan

more egocentric, and we can only recover our primary experience of God by learning to transcend our egotism.

This can be painful as only a crisis of faith can be. Recently I was talking to a mediator from the Philippines who told me how she had come to meditation. A young nephew of hers had been kidnapped and held for ransom. She and her prayer group joined with others around Manila to pray for the boy's safe release. They prayed round the clock and bombarded heaven with the most heartfelt prayers. When, a week later, the boy was murdered, she faced the most intense crisis of faith: whether to hate God or to love God more deeply, to give up prayer or to pray more deeply.

Petitionary prayer is not the heart of prayer. Crises of growth, such as the one I have described, have served to help me understand why St. Isaac of Syria said that we only begin to pray when we stop praying. I think of this now by seeing prayer as a great wheel which turns the cart of our life ever Godwards. Part of it is always toughing the ground: prayer must be rooted in daily reality. The outer rim is held together by the spokes: each spoke is a distinct form of prayer. Different spokes for different folks. The spokes themselves are united at the hub where there is stillness. For Christians, the hub is the prayer of Jesus in his union with God to which the Spirit guides us. . . .

I meditate at regular times each day, and usually integrate these half-hours of silence and stillness with the divine office or the Eucharist. Even when travelling across time-zones I try to keep to these regular times because they are precious and necessary for me. They teach me that the journey of prayer is made both on the micro and macro scale: not only are the daily wounds healed but the whole life-pattern is being resolved as well. My aim in praying at these set times is to learn to pray at all times. It is to expand temporary enlightenments into a continuous awareness of the presence of God. I have found that the more self-conscious this aim is, the less it can be realized. Prayer remains, like music, an art which achieves its excellence in peaks of grace that are essentially effortless.

The mantra offered me a simple way to this effortlessness, because by becoming rooted in the heart it can continue unaffected by irritability when waiting in a supermarket queue, or by frustration when missing a plane or having one's hopes dashed. Meditation is about remaining rooted in the center of being, deeper than external trials as well as all surface moods and waywardness. It is not, as every media-

tor knows, what happens during the meditation period that matters. The fruits of the spirit manifest themselves in ordinary daily realities.

One of the greatest gifts of prayer is that it makes everything sacred. This has also made me realize that there is nothing, not even the most pious work, including prayer, which cannot become an obstacle to the realization of God if the ego attempts to take it over. Prayer is the heart of religion precisely because it goes to the root of egotism, which is the basis of all separation and conflict.

In the experience of God the duality between sacred and profane is dissolved. This I feel is the aim of the monastic life—to have everything reveal and celebrate God—and this is why the monk's life -re

One of the greatest gifts of prayer is that it makes everything sacred.

volves around prayer. It is also why meditation reveals and fulfills the monastic archetype in every person and why this self-discovery begins the experience of true community. I do not think of meditation as a "higher" form of prayer meant for a spiritual elite. If anything, meditation, like monasticism, is meant for those with the bigger egos.

From the beginning I have realized that I always meditate in community, however solitary the place or mood. From this point, we are able to enter that experience of God which comes from seeing and sharing in the spiritual growth of others. This means the tremendous grace of friendship, encouragement and solidarity: everything that the New Testament means by *Koinonia*, communion, or the Buddhists by the *sangha*, community. It has also meant the discovery that the ego gets stronger and more disruptive even as people are drawn closer in this way. But meditation has deepened my belief in the eventual triumph of the spirit of unity.

Heart Trouble

NASIRA ALMA

Please send the story of your own "transforming experience" to the Editor, 291 Witherspoon Street, Princeton, NJ 08542. You need not be a professional writer.

My father died of cancer, which surprised everyone. Since young adulthood, he'd had heart trouble. "He certainly did," I had said to myself in moments of unhappiness for many years. Until his death when I was sixteen, he was the most important figure in my life, except God. I elicited criticism, praise, and instruction from my father in abundance. If I ever touched his heart, he didn't show it, until he came back from the hospital with a lung gone and said to me directly, "I love you." It was such a huge statement. We were so ill-prepared, so unaccustomed, so at a loss. Nothing more was said.

Last spring I developed edema. My naturopath said on the phone, "It could be heart. Get blood drawn right away."

There it was: I had heart trouble too. It had never occurred to me that my father's heart might have something to do with mine. When I thought of the metaphorical sense of that, I wept. Later I was overcome with shame. I had done to my father exactly what he'd done to me: I had expected him to be more than he was able to be. I'd had occasion in my life to find compassion in my heart for alcoholics, drug addicts, prostitutes, and con artists, but I had no compassion to spare for my own father.

God the Father disappeared from my prayer life when my father died. I preferred to pray to the Spirit. But now I asked the Divine Father to open my heart to my mortal father, to let me love his humanity complete with its limitations, and to trust that he loved me in an abiding way, not in the clutching way of someone struggling with fear of death.

Thursday night was Sufi *zikr*. Sufism is the mystical flowering of Islam. *Zikr* means "to remember"; the chanting and singing carry the

A poet and writer in Portland, OR, Nasira Alma is studying for the ministry.

Kay Danielson

deep self back to its Source, Which is experienced profoundly as Love. The group I belong to is led by a woman whose Sufi name is *Khadija Ashiqi*, after one of the wives of Muhammed.

The Sufis were sitting cross-legged in a circle, chanting *Allah* while *Khadija Ashiqi* greeted Adam, Noah, Abraham, all patriarchs and prophets known and unknown, and called on them to join us. In my heart, I asked my father to come pray with me.

The chant changed to "*la illaha ilallah*" ("God is the only Reality"). A few minutes later, eyes closed, I saw my father. He sat down in front of me. Our knees nearly touched. We gazed directly into each other's eyes. He looked as he had when he was forty, just before he became ill. From the vantage point of my forty-nine years, I saw how young and beautiful he was. . .*la illaha ilallah*. . .I remembered how I used to fret when he chewed gum before Holy Communion, afraid he'd go to hell. . .*la illaha ilallah* . . .how he used to yank out his gray hairs with tweezers and Mama teased him he'd make himself bald. . .*la illaha ilallah*. . .now I had much more gray than he ever did. . .*la illaha ilallah*.

We left the circle, my father and I. He took me to his family, my grandparents who died when I was small and their parents, aunts, uncles, cousins: a tribe of strongly built, wide-shouldered German-Americans, chanting for all they were worth *la illaha ilallah*. They embraced me; I belonged to them. . .*la illaha ilallah*.

For years I had been in and out of therapists' offices trying to finish my business with my father. I wanted to empty myself of my anger and find acceptance. Then I could go forward in life free of him.

The gift of that *zikr* was much better. Not an ending but a beginning that will be with me until death and beyond. My father and I made a heart connection: finally, love between us.

Ask Angela

BARBARA ACKERMAN

Do you have a question of the heart or spirit that needs attention? Angela, our canine sage-in-residence, would love to help. Please write to her in care of FiP, and she will answer you in our next issue.

Dear Angela,

I seem to be chronically cranky. I don't even have a really good reason to be, I just am. Can you offer us some thoughts on crankiness? Thank you.

Sincerely,
Cranky

Dear Cranky,

You've come to the right place with this question. Amongst my close circle of friends, I am not referred to as "Queen of the Cranks" for no reason. As a rule, however, canines have a firm grip on crankiness. They are rarely even affected by it. Most canines just can't focus on cranky feelings long enough to be cranky and therefore are excellent guides for humans who have cranky tendencies and would like to be less cranky. Fortunately for our questioner and my fans, I am a canine exception, and lead a happy and successful life as a crank. It's a tough job, but someone's gotta do it.

> It is difficult to feel cranky while you pray.

If you're going to be cranky, be it fully and completely, and get on with things. Don't waste energy feeling bad or guilty about feeling cranky. Focus totally on your crankiness, then let it go and putter playfully over to the kitchen or chase a squirrel.

Crankiness is not a totally negative feeling. We can sometimes gain valuable information by examining our crankies. We may discover that all is not well. Crankiness may alert us to the fact that more than air, water, a full food bowl, and a blanket are required for souls to feel

Cliff Moore

content, happy, and productive. Feeling cranky may be an accurate barometer that all is not well in our lives. If taken seriously, crankiness can help us transform our lives from ones of chronic crankiness to ones filled with headpats, cheese sauce, and beds with cedar-chip shavings.

Being in a bad mood can serve us in other ways. Crankies can gracefully or ungracefully help us cope with a difficult situation. Sometimes when I'm out walking with my buddy, I may get pooped out pretty unexpectedly. So pooped out that I can't make it back home under my own steam. When this happens to me, I sometimes feel frustrated and even scared a little—my body is failing me from time to time. So I cover up my scaries with crankies—I just plop myself down and become a 100-pound obstruction. This cranky attack gets results. All fourteen pounds of me get picked up and carried home. My mission is successfully accomplished.

For some of us, our cranky demeanor may be getting us the attention we need and want but don't feel we're getting—and have trouble asking for. We may be cranky because we have to ask for something in the first place.

For those of us in need of plenty of quiet meditative space, a cranky countenance works wonders in getting the privacy we need. For me personally, my crankiness has often bought me a quiet, unpeopled hour of refreshment on my blanket down in the basement away from the hustle and bustle of family life.

This, of course, brings me to the down side of crankiness. One drawback is that while we're feeling cranky, we're not chasing a squirrel or stealing a baloney sandwich left unattended on the arm of the living room couch.

When we are feeling our most cranky, we are most in need of love, affection, and understanding. So while we are most in need of relief from our cranky selves, it is at this moment that our crankies have banished us to a solitary afternoon down in the basement by the clothes dryer, cut off from all those who might be able to offer us what we crave. The crankies have backfired, unless, of course, it happens to be laundry day.

I can honestly say that despite my cranky tendencies, I lead a happy, productive life. When I am cranky, I sometimes go off by myself or sometimes I share them with a close personal friend, or with someone who might be able to do something about them. I allow ample

time to celebrate my cranky feelings. Through trial and error I've found many ways of living with my crankies and even losing them on occasion. All the techniques and ideas I leave with you now have helped me be a kinder, gentler crank these past few years. All these techniques have kept my crankies in check.

Angela Plan for Coping with Crankies

(1) Put on a Cheerios, cheese-sauce and chicken party.
(2) Eat small, dainty noshes of your favorite foods.
(3) Twirl in place.
(4) Nap well and often.
(5) Engage in loud but pleasing noise-making activities.
(6) Investigate every bush and mud puddle.
(7) Go out on squirrel-chasing expeditions.
(8) Bark often with feeling from behind your own front door.
(9) Find a loved one to be cranky with.
(10) Arrange lap time with a close personal friend.
(11) Keep a balance between romping and napping, exercise and eating, solitude and socializing.
(12) Sniff deeply and often.
(13) Love doesn't cure the crankies, but it sometimes helps.
(14) Offer up a simple small prayer. It is difficult to feel cranky while you pray.

I hope I have been of some help to everyone who must deal with crankiness, be it their own or others'.

Faithfully,
Angela

JEWISH RENEWAL - A PATH TO HEALING AND TRANSFORMATION *by Michael Lerner, G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1994, $25.95*

We are at the beginning, says Lerner, of another era in which Judaism renews its origins as the practice of *tikkun*, of healing, repair, and transformation. God, Lerner tells us, is a Force whose essence is freedom, love, justice, transcendence, and compassion. It is this Force that makes possible healing and transformation of ourselves and of the world.

To bring about this renewal requires deep inner work—healing our psychological pain, reawakening our spiritual selves, and allowing time in our daily lives to nurture our souls. "It also," says Lerner, "requires active participation in a community that is as fully involved in transformative political activities as it is in spiritual growth and in celebration of the grandeur and wonder of God's creation."

Lerner's aim "is to underline the ways in which everything is alive, capable of interacting with the rest of the universe (in increasingly conscious and self-determining ways as matter organizes itself in greater complexity), and permeated with God's spiritual energy." Lerner has succeeded in a major way, and this exciting and deeply thought-provoking book will greatly enrich all who care about our role as expressions of the ultimate moral and spiritual realities of the universe. *PW*

THE FRUITFUL DARKNESS: RECONNECTING WITH THE BODY OF THE EARTH *by Joan Halifax, HarperSan Francisco, 1993, 240 pages, paperback, $12.00*

A member of the Advisory Board of Fellowship in Prayer, President of the Upaya Foundation, anthropologist, author, and visionary, Joan Halifax has lived with aboriginal people all over the world, studying the wisdom of their ways and looking for possibilities of integrating indigenous practices into technological culture. In this book, her spiritual autobiography, she weaves experiences of rugged treks across the sacred mountains of Tibet, of praying with Native Americans, chanting to whales, dancing in African religious rites, with one initiation after another in the "fruitful darkness" that gives birth to compassion. Her profound encounters with native peoples, animals and nature create a strong sense of the cosmic network in which she would like everyone to consciously participate. *MFG*

We welcome your comments. Please write to The Editor, Fellowship in Prayer, 291 Witherspoon Street, Princeton, NJ 08542.

Thank you for *Fellowship in Prayer*! If all peoples of the world could embrace the understanding of one another's religious beliefs as you do, this world could be a safe haven for all. Would that we could learn that we are all children of the same Creator-Parent and nurtured by our Mother Earth. You make it all so simple. What richness there is in diversity. . .I am so glad to have *FiP* in my life.

Roberta Suppes; Portland, OR

I am going through "the dark night of the soul" but I find some light in *FiP*.

Name Withheld; Mt. View, CA

Thanks for *Fellowship in Prayer*. I always read it straight through—and then read it again and pass it on. You do a wonderful service for those of us who are multi-denominational (trans-denominational?). I am enclosing $100. Thanks and blessings.

Name Withheld; Kensington, MD

My devotion to Mary, the Mother of Jesus, had to be rather faint and weak. . .for a nun. I only said one part of the rosary a day, sometimes not even that. The 3 1/2 hours a day spent on the Centering Prayer took up most of the time. Then God moved in my life. I lost the vision in my right eye. I could see only a black blur. This went on for months. A couple of weeks ago the left eye worsened. I kept asking God, "Please don't take my full vision away. I am 91 years old, but I can still do work for you, Lord." It got so bad that I needed to wear patches over both eyes. I prayed to Mary one night as I went to bed with the patches on. Waking up at about six a.m.—no plastic—I COULD SEE!

God and Mary sometimes give double gifts. In addition to perfect sight, I received great devotion to the Mother of God and increased my practice to 5 rosaries a day. Thank you for publishing this miracle. I used to see just half of the world. Now I see everything! Your little magazine is a great help to my spiritual life. I pass it around to the 300 or so retired Sisters here.

S. Catherine de Sales; St Mary of the Woods, IN

The suggested donation for a year of *Fellowship in Prayer* is $16.00. Many readers, however, send more than that amount as a way of becoming a "Spiritual Friend" to those unable to contribute (especially men and women in hospitals, nursing and old age homes, and religious institutions).

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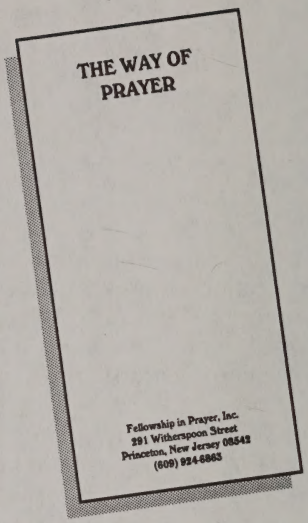

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What would you like to tell us about your spiritual needs, desires, experiences? About *Fellowship in Prayer*? Use the space below!

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We welcome articles on prayer, meditation, spiritual experience, religious faith or practices, and similar topics. Preference is given to experiential manuscripts. Manuscripts should not exceed 1500 words, should be typed, double spaced, on $8\frac{1}{2}$ by 11 inch paper, on a $5\frac{1}{4}$ inch floppy minidisk, 2S/2D, or 2S/HD, or on $3\frac{1}{2}$ HD microdisks, in WordPerfect and sent to The Editor, Fellowship in Prayer, 291 Witherspoon Street, Princeton, NJ 08542-3227. Please include a brief biography.

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We are often asked to share names and addresses with other non-profit spiritual organizations whose work might be of interest to you. If that's not all right with you, please drop us a note and we will withold your name.

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